

SB 387 An Act Concerning the Recommendations of the Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee., S.B. 387

IN SUPPORT OF SB 387

March 13, 2022

Dear Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom, and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Brittany LaMarr and I am a Justice Advisor with the [Connecticut Justice Alliance](https://www.ctja.org) (CTJA). I am writing this testimony to communicate my support for **S.B. 387**. The CTJA is a statewide youth-adult partnership working to end the criminalization of youth. The Alliance includes Justice Staff, Justice Advisors, and Steering Committee members, which includes lawyers, researchers, clinicians, and social workers, who work across issues areas such as mental/behavioral health, family advocacy, substance abuse, youth services, LGBTQ+ issues, legal representation, education, community and residential services, and public policy reform.

We are a youth/adult partnership that is composed of directly impacted young people. A tool that we use to engage in conversation with all stakeholders of the criminal justice system is vision sessions. Our organization goes into spaces for example, community town halls, the Juvenile Review Board, staff-secure facilities, police departments, and detention centers and hosts conversations around a particular youth justice issue. We facilitate the conversation with scenarios and questions and listen to what the individuals most closely related to and directly impacted by the criminal justice system have to say.

The conversations we have with the directly impacted communities, families, individuals, and professionals working in the field, allow for a very well rounded and informed evaluation and analysis of the juvenile justice system as it is intended to be while including all the collateral and unintended consequences that result from a system that emphasizes punishment instead of restoration and rehabilitation. The JJPOC is a well-rounded committee that includes the contributions and perspectives of both Republicans and Democrats, state agencies, and professionals that work directly with young people involved in the criminal justice system. However, there is a critical viewpoint that has yet to have a seat on the JJPOC and that is the perspective of directly impacted young people. They are the individuals put through the system we create, with the greatest amount of information on how the juvenile justice system has impacted their lives - its strengths, weaknesses, and gaps.

Therefore, if our goal is to make the most educated policy decisions, the voice of young people needs to be a part of the conversation. I think it is safe to say that if the legislature were looking to craft legislation regarding any other business or service, elected officials would look for input from the consumers of those services. I also think that is because there is an understanding that those closest to the problem are those closest to the solution. If the goal is to create targeted interventions to improve the efficiency and efficacy of a program or service it would be wise to understand what needs are not being met by the system as it currently exists and gather input from consumers as to how it can be improved.

I fully support SB 387, and in particular adding to the JJPOC membership two individuals under 26 years of age who have been directly impacted by the juvenile justice system. There should be no conversation about young people and their needs without asking young people who have been involved in the system what those needs are.

Thank you for allowing me to submit testimony today.

Sincerely,
Brittany LaMarr, *Justice Advisor*